

## Message Text

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QUOTE

UNCLAS BANGKOK 11217

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, TH, LA

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTRY REMARKS ON THAI-LAO RELATIONS

PRACHA KUNAKASEM, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT AND SPOKESMAN FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE JULY 10. FOLLOWING IS AN UNOFFICIAL USIS TRANSLATION OF HIS COMMENTS ON THAI-LAO RELATIONS:

PRACHA: ANOTHER SUBJECT I WISH TO SPEAK OF IS IN REGARD TO A REPORT PUBLISHED IN NEWSPAPERS, A REPORT QUOTING A STATEMENT MADE BY PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA THAT THERE ARE NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS REMAINING IN LAOS AND REQUESTING FOR NORTH VIETNAM TROOPS IN LAOS TO BE WITHDRAWN. THIS STATEMENT MADE BY THE LAO PREMIER HIMSELF CONFIRMS THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS STILL REMAIN IN LAOS. MY PERSONAL VIEW IS THAT NOBODY CAN BE BETTER INFORMED OF THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF LAOS THAN THE LAO PREMIER. IT IS A FACT THAT HIS REQUEST IS JUST AND PROPER, BECAUSE UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT WHEN A COALITION GOVERNMENT IS SET UP, ALL

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SIDES MUST WITHDRAW ALL FOREIGN FORCES COMPLETELY FROM LAOS

WITHIN SIXTY DAYS. THEREFORE SINCE ALL OTHER SIDES HAVE WITHDRAWN FOREIGN TROOPS ALREADY, NORTH VIETNAM OUGHT TO WITHDRAW ITS TROOPS ALSO. THEREFORE, WE SUPPORT THIS DEMAND MADE BY PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA IN ORDER TO MAKE LAOS REALLY NEUTRAL. IT IS THE DESIRE OF THAILAND ALSO FOR LAOS TO BE REALLY NEUTRAL AND FREE FROM INTERFERENCE FROM OUTSIDE.

REPORTER: WILL WE ENDEAVOR TO MAKE THAILAND AND LAOS AS CLOSE AND INTIMATE AS THEY WERE IN THE PAST, BEFORE THE LATTER HAD A COALITION GOVERNMENT?

PRACHA: WE ARE MAKING MOVES IN VARIOUS WAYS, SUCH AS TAKING UP THE MATTER OF THE ETO FOR CONSIDERATION. LAOS IS IN A SOMEWHAT DISADVANTAGEOUS POSITION BECAUSE IT IS A COUNTRY WHICH IS LANDLOCKED WITH NO SEACOAST. ALL TRANSPORTATION HAS TO PASS THROUGH OTHER COUNTRIES, MAINLY THROUGH THAILAND AT PRESENT. IT DEPENDS MAINLY ON OUR SERVICES FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS IT IMPORTS AND THAT IT EXPORTS, THEREFORE WE ARE CONSIDERING WAYS TO HELP FACILITATE TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS IN A MORE ORDERLY MANNER.

REPORTER: A NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED A NEWS REPORT YESTERDAY WHICH STATED THAT THAILAND ALLOWS AMERICAN U-2 AIRCRAFT TO MAKE PATROL FLIGHTS OVER LAOS. DOESN'T THAT CONSTITUTE A VIOLATION?

PRACHA: PLEASE GO AND PUT QUESTIONS ON MILITARY AFFAIRS TO GENERAL KRIANGSAK. I DID NOT EVEN KNOW THAT THERE WERE U-2 AIRCRAFT BASED IN UTAPAO. BUT AMERICAN MILITARY FORCES WHICH ARE STATIONED HERE ARE FRIENDS OF THAILAND, BUT NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN LAOS ARE NOT FRIENDS OF LAOS. THAT IS THE DIFFERENCE. WE WANT THAILAND AND LAOS TO CONTINUE BEING CLOSE FRIENDS, BECAUSE WE ARE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES WITH A COMMON BORDER, WITH THE MEKONG RIVER ONLY SEPARATING US. WE WANT OUR RELATIONS WITH EVERY AND ALL NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES TO BE THE BEST POSSIBLE, FOR THE SECURITY OF THAILAND ITSELF, AS WELL AS IN OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS.

REPORTER: THROUGH WHOM WILL TALKS AND CONSULTATIONS, AS WELL AS EXCHANGE OF VIEWS, BE HELD?

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PRACHA: AT DIPLOMATIC LEVELS--BETWEEN OUR AMBASSADOR AND THE LAO GOVERNMENT, AND BETWEEN THE LAO AMBASSADOR AND OUR GOVERNMENT. PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA HAS VISITED THAILAND SEVERAL TIMES, AND WHENEVER HE WENT TO PARIS OR TO NEW YORK, HE WAS APT TO CHANGE PLANE HERE AND WE INVITED HIM TO STOP OVER IN OUR COUNTRY EVERY TIME.

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